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**The Citroen Garage Site,
Merridale Lane,
Merridale,
Wolverhampton:
A Desk-Based Assessment**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit



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**The Citroen Garage Site, Merridale Lane, Merridale, Wolverhampton:
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by
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The Citroen Garage Site, Merridale Lane, Merridale, Wolverhampton: A Desk-Based Assessment

Summary

In May 2003 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) carried out a desk-based assessment of the Citroen garage site in Merridale Lane, Merridale, Wolverhampton (NGR SO 9002 9845), for the construction company Design to Build. The land was formerly occupied by the farm buildings of what is now the Old Farmhouse and Dairy, a Grade II Listed Building of medieval origin. The origins of Merridale may lie in the late Saxon or medieval period. There is specific archaeological and historical evidence for occupation on the site of the Old Farmhouse from around the 1200s onwards. The association of the farm with dairy farming probably began in earnest in the 18th or early 19th century. The 20th century history of the farmstead was one of gradual decline, as the farmland was gradually swallowed by the suburban sprawl of Wolverhampton. This culminated in the conversion of the farmhouse to a terrace of three shops with accommodation over in the 1930s, and the demolition of the farm buildings in the 1960s.

1.0 Introduction

In May 2003 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) carried out a desk-based assessment of the Citroen garage site in Merridale Lane, Merridale, Wolverhampton. The land was formerly occupied by the farm buildings of what is now the Old Farmhouse and Dairy, a Grade II Listed Building of medieval origin that survives on an adjacent plot, and which was itself the subject of archaeological investigations by BUFAU in 2001 and 2002 (Litherland and Watt 2001; Hislop 2002). The former farm complex is an important historic site because of the survival of parts of a medieval building (The Old Hall and Dairy) above ground, and also because of the potential for survival of buried archaeological deposits. The results of the assessment are intended to enable the local authority to make an informed decision regarding the intended scheme of works planned for the whole site. The work was carried out according to a brief prepared by Mike Shaw, the Black Country Archaeologist (Shaw 2003).

2.0 Site Location

The Citroen garage lies approximately 1.5 km to the west of Wolverhampton town centre on the west side of Merridale Lane, close to the junction with Merridale Road, at NGR SO 9002 9845 (Figs 1 and 2). The area covered by the assessment (hereafter called the Study Area) is around 3000 square metres, and is bounded by Merridale Avenue to the north, the Old Farmhouse and Dairy to the south, Merridale Lane to the east, and 20th-century housing to the west. The site is located on the shoulder of a gently sloping boulder clay ridge with a southwest aspect. This overlooks the valley of the Graiseley Brook, which has cut through the boulder clay into an outcrop of Upper Mottled Sandstone.

3.0 Objectives

- To establish past land use of the Study Area and its immediate environs.
- To establish the character of buildings previously on the site.
- To attempt to locate the petrol tanks associated with the filling station.

4.0 Methods

Documentary research of primary and secondary records and maps was carried out at Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies. The Black Country Sites and Monuments Record, the primary source of known archaeological information for the Wolverhampton area, was also consulted, and telephone enquiries were made to the National Monuments Record, Swindon, and the William Salt Library and County Record Office, Stafford. All sources consulted are listed in Section 8.0 ('Sources') below.

5.0 Historical Background

The Place Name

Earlier spellings of the place name Merridale appear to be either *Meredale* or *Muridene*. In the absence of a detailed place name investigation these would appear to be topographic descriptions, the *mere-* element referring to either a lake, marsh or boundary, of which the latter is, perhaps, the most applicable, and the *-dale* or *-dene* element referring to a valley, usually in a wooded area of low hills. Until the later 19th century both spellings seem to have been used, and will be reproduced here as they appear in the original context to which the text is referring. The prefix 'Old' began to be used in the 19th century and was later used to distinguish the farm from New Merridale, a larger house to the south. Some time in the later 19th or early 20th century the present name of the Old Farmhouse and Dairy became the normal name of the existing structure immediately south of the Development Site, possibly, after it was converted to shops, as a means of remembering its earlier function.

Medieval and early post-medieval history

Wolverhampton was an important regional settlement prior to the Norman Conquest. The cross outside the minster Church of St Peter, for example, has been dated to between the 8th and 9th centuries. It has also been suggested that Merridale may have been a hamlet by the time of the Domesday Survey of 1086, even though South Staffordshire was quite sparsely populated at this time (Mander & Tildesley 1960). Certainly, Wolverhampton retained its settlement status into the medieval period, by which time the borough of Wolverhampton was divided into the town, and its hinterland which was called 'the foreign'. A number of 'assartments' or woodland clearances took place in the 12th and 13th centuries around Wolverhampton and several small estates or large farms, some of

which were also moated sites, were established at this time. Local examples of this type of site include Old Fallings Hall, Moseley Old Hall, Northcote Farm and Showell's Farm Moat, all situated to the north of Merridale. Generally speaking, these estates tended to belong to the 'middling folk' of medieval society, such as yeoman farmers or people who had made money from business. While no definitive evidence has been found to prove that Old Merridale Farm was a medieval moated site, there was a large pond and two fields called banky field nearby, and the estate was of sufficient status and antiquity for a moat to have been dug around it.

Nevertheless, the precise origins of Meredale or Merridale must remain unclear. The earliest documentation specific to Merridale dates from the 1200s (White 1995), when the Salford family acquired the estate through marriage. Their estate lay within Wolverhampton Foreign not far from the Bridgnorth Road, a regionally important medieval trade route. The family retained ownership of the estate until the early 17th century, but no family papers were traced as part of this assessment, so little light can be shed on their background or the known periods of development of Old Merridale Farm. The subsequent ownership of the property also proved difficult to trace. The 17th-century Huntbach manuscript mentions the names Jackson and Thomas Barnfield in connection with the estate (White 1995), but Mander (1960) refers to a mercer, William Normansell, as being the owner in the early 17th century. By 1663-73, the Hearth Tax returns refer to a John Thrustance de Merredell as the owner. A total of six hearths was taxed. This suggests that in the late 17th century the farmhouse comprised three main ranges, a cross-wing, main range, and, possibly, a solar, each one room deep, two storeys high, and heated on both floors.

The eighteenth century

The 18th century was a period of widespread change. The urban population of Wolverhampton was beginning to expand dramatically, and the coalfields to the east of the town were being increasingly exploited. There were also changes in the organisation of farming, reflected by both enclosure and rationalisation of farmland and the sub-letting of several of the estates immediately surrounding the town. In addition, the 18th century was a period of relative prosperity that saw profound developments in terms of building technology and taste, and several buildings of the 'middling' status of Merridale were remodelled in brick at this time.

The continued growth of the urban boundaries of Wolverhampton in the later 18th century may have had a negative effect on the desirability of properties like Merridale as 'gentlemen's' farmsteads. Furthermore, in the days before refrigeration, the provision of milk to the urban population was, of necessity, a local industry, and a number of dairy farms sprang up near the large industrial towns of the West Midlands. Therefore, this period may have seen the beginnings of the association of Merridale with dairy farming, although the precise chronology of this change, together with the date it changed status from a 'gentleman's farm' to a working farm, remains unclear.

The nineteenth century

In 1801, Merridale belonged to the Petit family, and in 1842, when the Tithe Survey was made, John Lewis Petit remained the owner of 'Old' Meredale Farm and the land surrounding it. The prefix 'Old', like Old Fallings and Moseley Old Hall, may have arisen to denote farmsteads of ancient status as opposed to the new farms created by enclosure and other agricultural improvements. The Tithe Map (Fig. 3), which was the first map of sufficient scale to identify Old Meredale Farm, also shows another large house to the south, named Meredale, which, by 1871, was known as New Merridale. This evidence confirms that a downgrading in the status of Old Meredale Farm had occurred by the mid-19th century.

At the time of the Tithe Survey William Myers was in occupation of Old Meredale Farmhouse, farmyard and outbuildings. The farm was still surrounded by fields, with meadows along the Graiseley Brook to the south and a sandstone escarpment that may have been a local source of building stone from an early period. In addition, the large pond situated to the west of the farm next to a *Kitchen Garden* may once have been a fishpond that was part of a broader water management system associated with a moat. The names of two fields to the south of the farm called *Big Banky Field* and *Little Banky Field* may also refer to physical features associated with a moat. However, there were several other large ponds in the vicinity that were probably dug to quarry marl. The Tithe Map quite clearly shows the farmhouse and, to the north of it, a complex of farmbuildings bordering three sides of the eastern portion of the Development Site. These buildings together with a fence to the west enclosed a rectangular farmyard. At the northwest angle of the farmyard, just outside the Development Site was a smaller enclosure containing a building, probably a cottage, at its east end.

The 1852 Health of Towns Act map (Fig. 4) shows little change to Old Meredale, though the farmbuildings are depicted as a series of separate structures, rather than an integrated block. Some housing was beginning to encroach upon the angle between Merridale Road and Merridale Lane, between which a new road had been inserted. A map of 1871 is the first one at a large enough scale to allow the identification of specific features of the buildings comprising Old Merridale Farm (Fig.5). It shows that between 1852 and 1871 an extension had been made to the west gable of the Dairy that was separated from the cross-wing by a covered passage. The Dairy had a set of stairs rising from the farmyard, presumably to aid hygiene. In addition, the angle between the gabled stair tower and the main range was extended to the west between 1852 and 1871. The small square building at the northwest corner of the farmhouse was probably a privy. A formal garden was laid out in front of the farmhouse, and gardens containing trees and path lay to the south and west. Some of the functions of the farm buildings to the north of the farmhouse, and within the Development Site, were also noted on the 1871 map. These buildings were arranged in an irregular U-shape around a farmyard, and are a typical assortment of buildings associated with a mixed dairy farm. There was a storage barn at the northern end, with a rickyard beyond it. The eastern block comprised another barn and three other buildings with abbreviated names. 'Co. H' is probably the Cow House, 'S.H.' may be a Slaughterhouse, and 'S.T.' may denote a stable (and possibly tackroom). Another

possible cow house existed in the southern building, which was discrete from the main block.

The twentieth century

By the early 20th century the farm was in decline. While the layout and boundaries of the farmyard complex remained broadly similar on the Ordnance Survey map editions of 1889 (Fig. 6), 1905 and 1919, and a council plan of 1921, urban development was steadily encroaching on the farm. In 1878, Henry Wright Owen, a merchant, had leased the property to Thomas Clarke, a farmer. Correspondence from the early 20th century relating to Merridale Farm shows that the buildings were in poor condition, and a specification made in 1905 outlined a large amount of sanitary repair work that needed to be carried out. In 1908, the Chief Sanitary Inspector reported in a letter to the solicitors Nock and Joseland that 'the floor of the dairy...is in a defective condition. One of the buildings used as a cowshed is very dilapidated, and without proper light and ventilation, or sufficient drainage. Further, the building adjoining the cottage and used as a shed is without proper and sufficient means of lighting, and the drainage is insufficient. The yard surface generally is insufficiently drained, and liquid lies about the surface. The buildings generally are dilapidated and there is no proper manure receptacle.'

A specification and costing from c.1911 listed a large amount of repair work on the roof and eaves of the farmhouse, the cutting of a doorway from the pantry to the passage to create an office, floor reinforcing work, cement work and repairs to the farm buildings. The building survey was able to confirm that most of this work was actually carried out. However, the farmhouse appears to have remained in a poor general condition after the repairs. A letter dated 1920 from the tenant Ernest Clarke, a butcher, to Nock and Joseland, complained as follows: 'I notice according to my agreement that I am bound to keep the inside of the farmhouse in good condition. I beg to state that owing to the bad condition of the roof and all the outside of the house it is impossible for me to keep the inside of the house in good condition. Owing to the damp the colouring comes off, also the paper very soon after it has been done.' In 1919 Ernest Clarke was forced, by labour difficulties, to auction off his whole dairy herd and, in 1926, he gave up the farm. Sale catalogues detail his livestock and agricultural implements up for auction.

Photographs taken by Mander in January 1930 show the farmhouse in a very dilapidated state. The cross-wing was missing its roof tiles and most of the uppermost panels of the timber frame were empty. The cross-wing retained the suggestion of a jetty on its northern face, although the jetty of the eastern gable had been under-filled with brick. Shortly after these photographs were taken, the farmhouse was refurbished and the ground floor converted into three shops. There was a plan drawn up in c.1930 that illustrated the floor plan prior to these alterations.

By 1938, housing development had encroached on the site of Old Merridale Farm. Merridale Avenue had been inserted to the north of the farmyard and rows of semi-detached houses were built on the land previously covered by gardens and fields. The pond was also filled in and partly built over. The northern range of farm buildings was

demolished, along with a house to the west. A set of photographs taken in 1961, some of which are reproduced here (Plates 1 - 4), shows the remaining farm buildings, ranged along Merridale Lane shortly before they were demolished. At the time they were in use as a garage, and there were two main components: a predominantly timber-framed range to the south with pebbledash-infill panels and a plain tile roof, and, to the north, breaking forward from this range, a flat-roofed building with pebbledash walls. These structures can be readily identified with those depicted on the map of 1871. The northern section was formerly the cow house, and the southern section the barn, and possible slaughter house and stable. The north and south wings both appear to have been demolished by this time. None of the original features of the cowhouse are visible in the photograph. The pitched roof had been taken down, and towards the road were two 20th-century windows and two recesses holding petrol pumps. Consequently, nothing can be said about its date.

The south range, however, is more easily made out. The timber-framing was of slight scantling and the roof was of king-post construction, both characteristics that suggest an 18th-century date. The barn lay to the north, the former entrance to the threshing floor being utilised as the vehicular entrance to the garage, having high paired doors, the upper part of the opening being occupied by a sign bearing the legend 'Merridale Garage Co. Ltd'. The threshing floor probably occupied the centre bay of a three-bay building, though the evidence of the exposed framing is not entirely clear. Other features of this front at the time the photographs were taken appear to have been 20th-century in date, and included two petrol pump recesses and a shop window. To the south was a timber shop front with a door to the left and a window to the right. Above it was a metal advertisement reading 'Player's Please'. To the rear, this part of the building had a 20th-century door and flanking windows beneath a long lintel, perhaps from an earlier entrance, or a remnant of former timber-framing.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The assessment has revealed no evidence for any development on the Development Site prior to the construction of the garage, other than the farmbuildings that first appear in the documentary record in 1852, on the periphery of the eastern portion. Some of these structures appear to have been of timber-framed construction and of early eighteenth-century date, and were probably set on stone plinths with shallow foundations, in conformity with contemporary building practice. The only archaeological traces of these buildings are likely to be elements of the stone plinths and floor surfaces, probably of earth, though it is possible that they were not all timber-framed, in which case more substantial, brick or stone foundations might survive. However, the antiquity of the site, which was confirmed by an archaeological building survey of the Old Farmhouse and Dairy (Litherland and Watts 2001), gives rise to the possibility that remains of the predecessors to the farmbuildings might survive below ground level. In particular, evidence for earth-fast post construction might be expected, or vestiges of early timber-framing in the form of beam slots, or even a combination of the two techniques. In addition, the southwestern extremity of the western portion of the Development Site borders the hypothetical line of a possible moat (Litherland and Watts 2001).

The conversion of the farmbuildings into a garage, with a total of five petrol pumps ranged along the roadside, almost certainly disturbed the archaeology in the immediate vicinity of the pumps, and the in the area of the storage tanks. The position of the latter has not been located, but the most likely position is to the rear of the buildings in the former farmyard, which is now largely occupied by the present building. It is probable too that the construction of the garage building in the 1960s has destroyed the archaeology within the footprint of its foundations, but the assessment indicates that the eastern part of the forecourt area, which was latterly occupied by the farmbuildings, as well as the western portion of the Development Site, have been relatively little disturbed. It is recommended that both these areas be subjected to archaeological evaluation, and trenches excavated within the known timber-framed structures of the former and at the southwestern angle of the latter (Fig. 2). An estimated cost for such an operation would be in the region of £3,500.

7.0 Acknowledgements

This research for this report was carried out by Steve Litherland and Malcolm Hislop. Steve Litherland also managed the project for BUFAU and edited the report. Nigel Dodds prepared the illustrations. Thanks are due to the staff of the record offices at Wolverhampton, Stafford and the National Buildings Record, Swindon.

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8.1 Primary Sources

- | | |
|-----------|--|
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| 1919-1923 | Rent Apportionments, Revisions and Assessment Appeals at Merridale Farm D-NAJ/C/18/3 |
| 1919 | Sales Material |
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| 1995 | Department of National Heritage Schedule of Listed Buildings |

8.2 Secondary Sources

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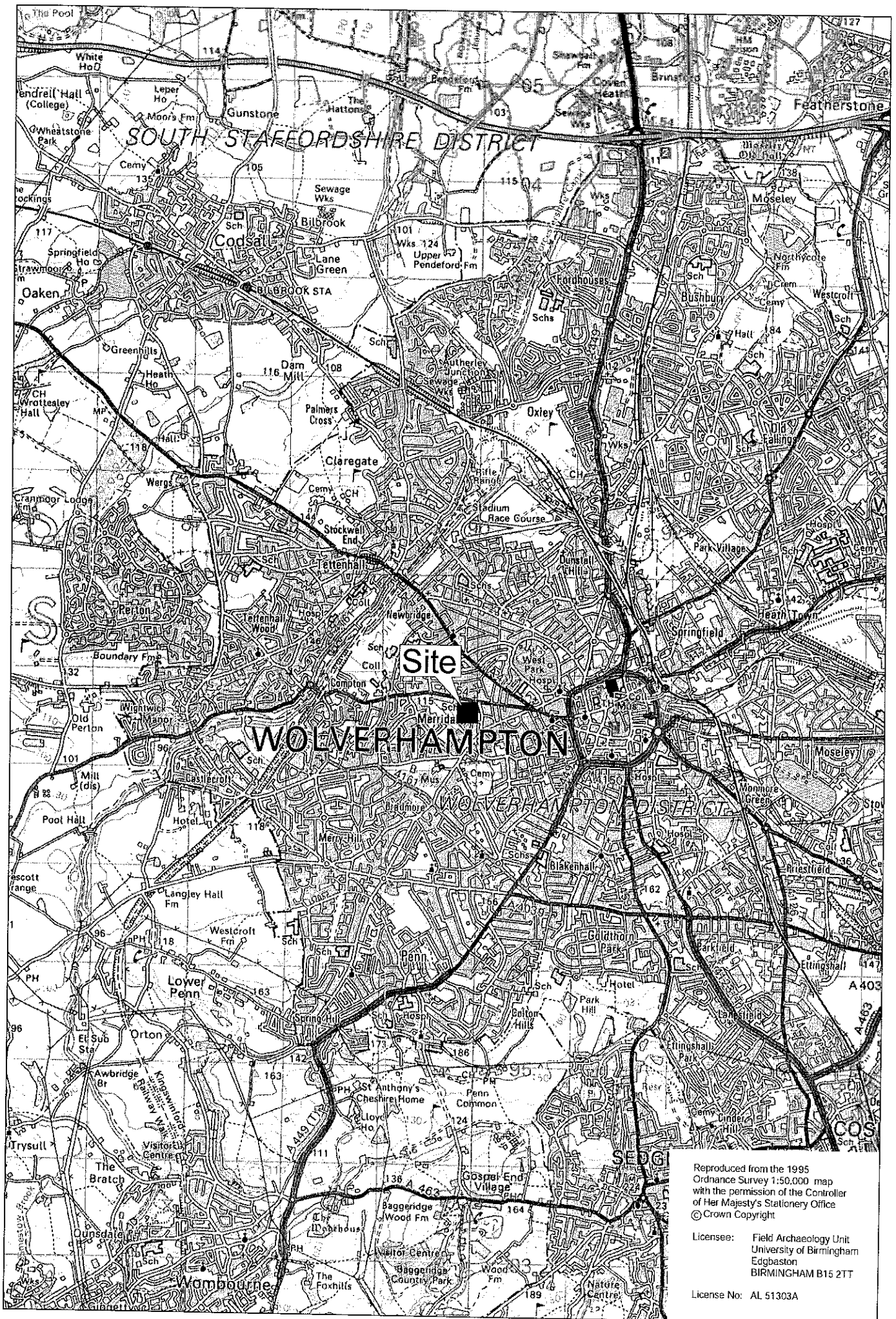
8.3 Cartographic Sources

- 1842 Wolverhampton Tithe Map and Award
- 1852 Health of Towns Act Map
- 1871 Map of Wolverhampton
- 1889 First Edition Ordnance Survey Map
- 1905 Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map
- 1919 Third Edition Ordnance Survey Map
- 1921 Plan of Proposed Main over the Trustees and W.H. Owens Land
- c.1929 Plans for Development Proposal
- 1938 Ordnance Survey Map

Photographs

From Wolverhampton Archives:

- L8/MER/E/3 1961
- K6/MER/E/1-6 1961



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Fig.1

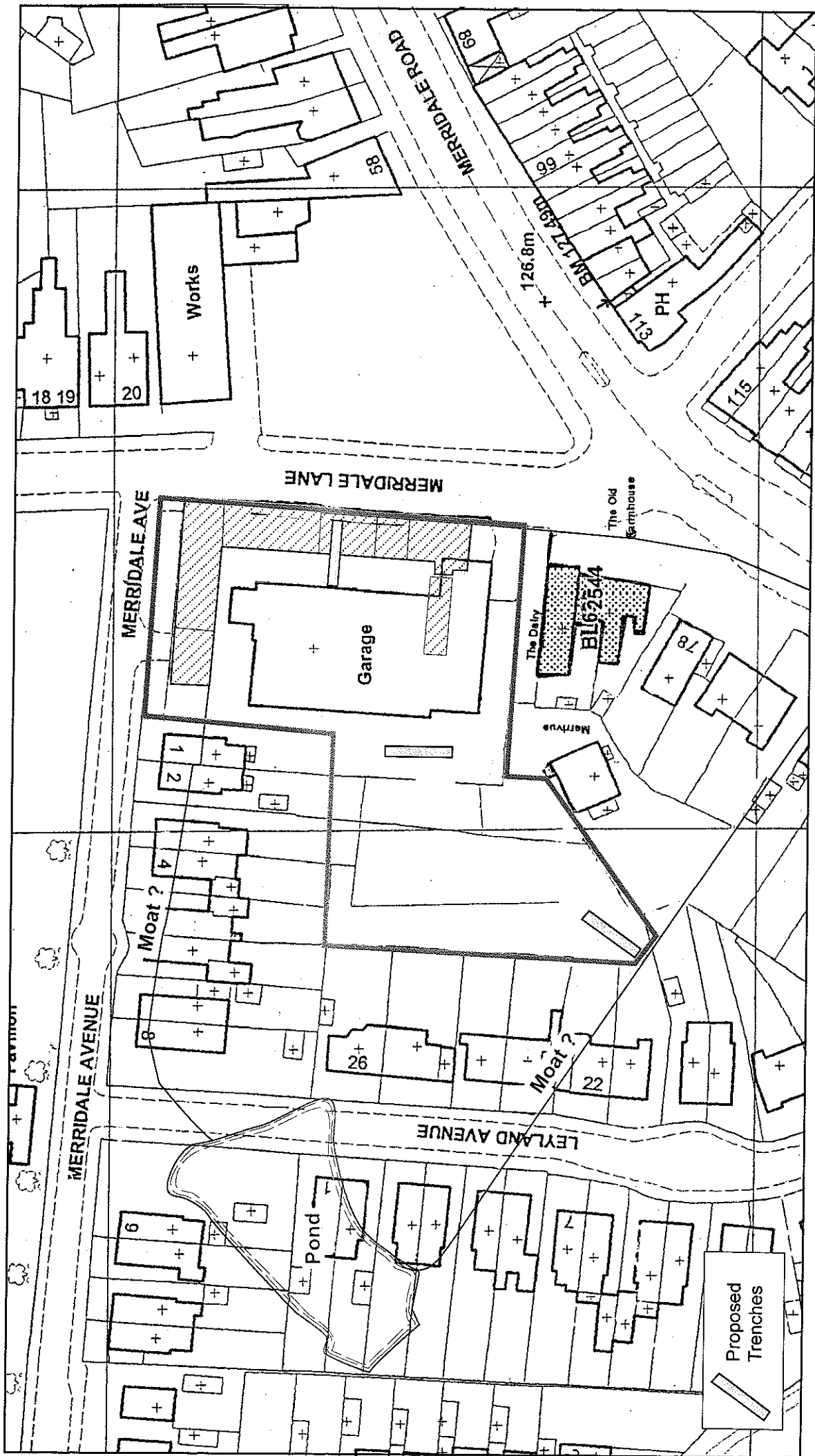


Fig.2

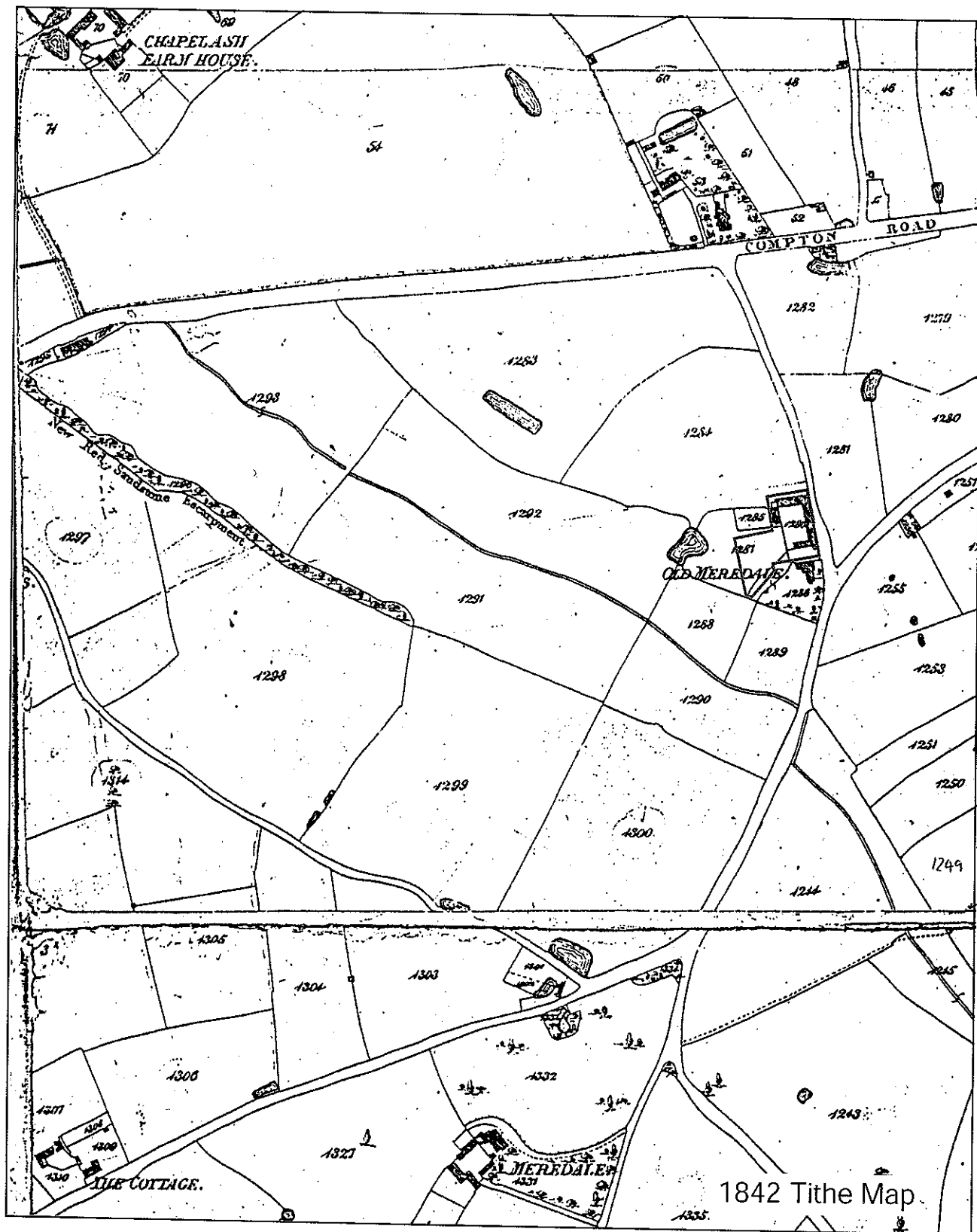


Fig.3



Fig.4

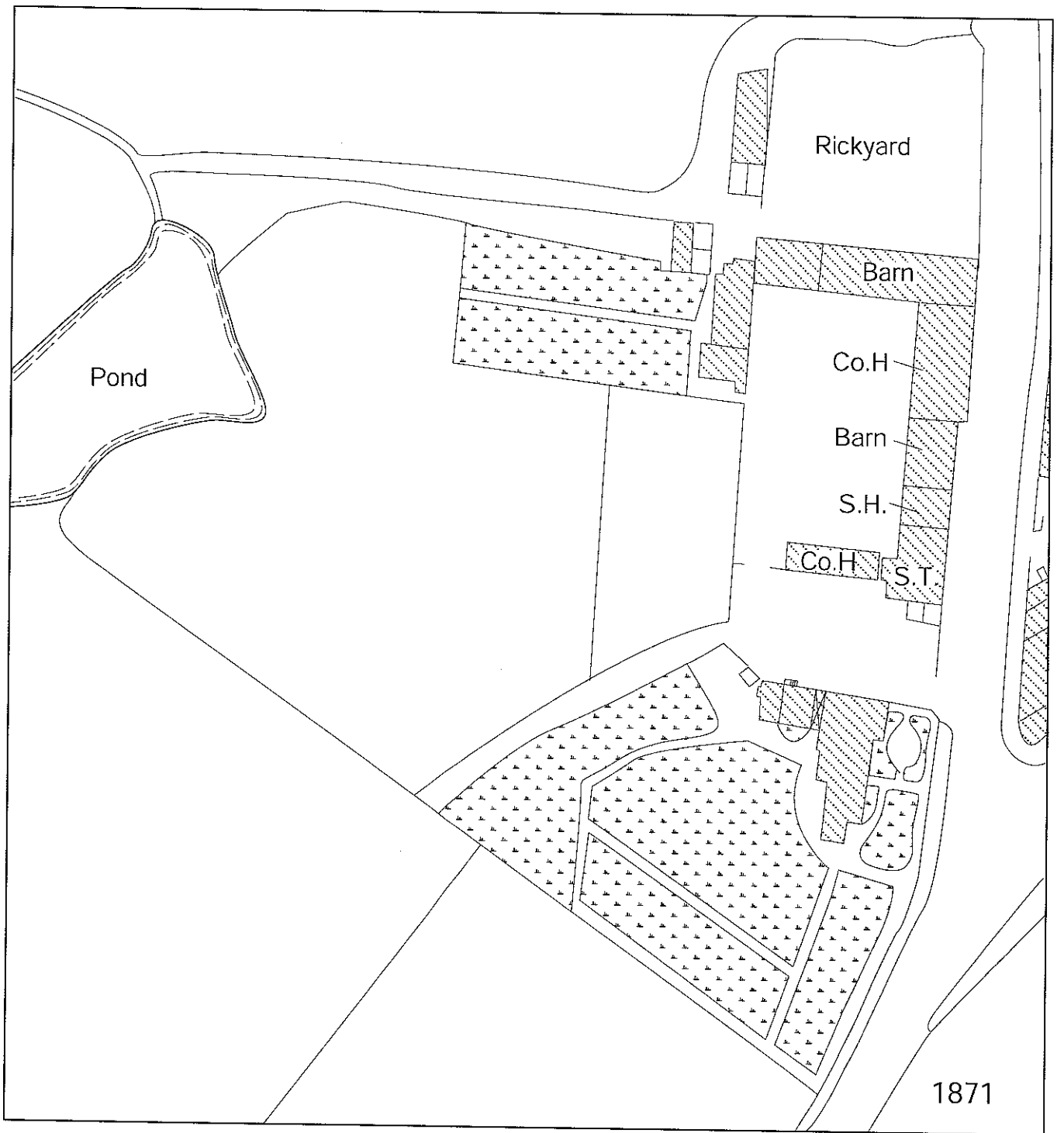


Fig.5

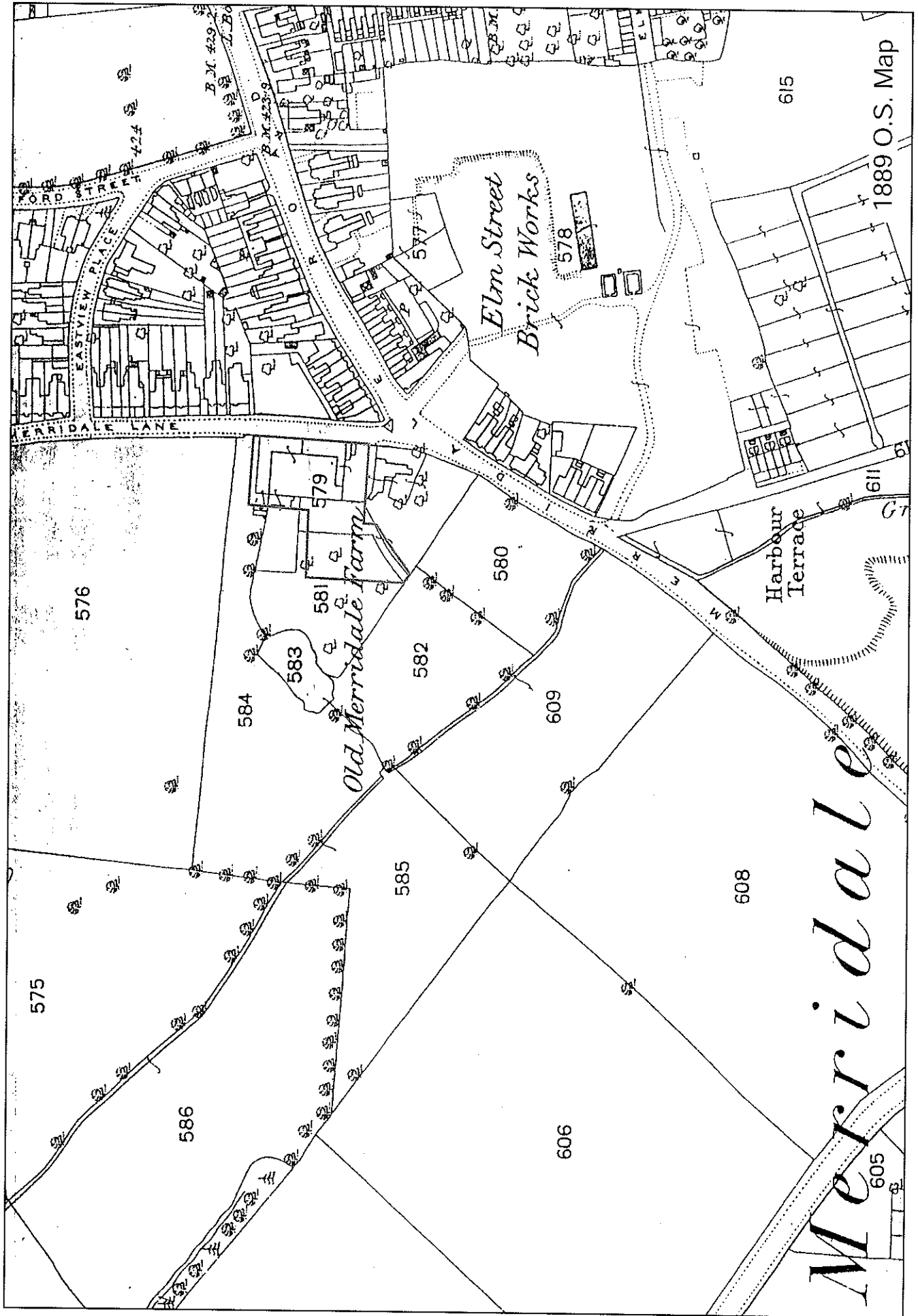


Fig.6



Plate 1



Plate 2

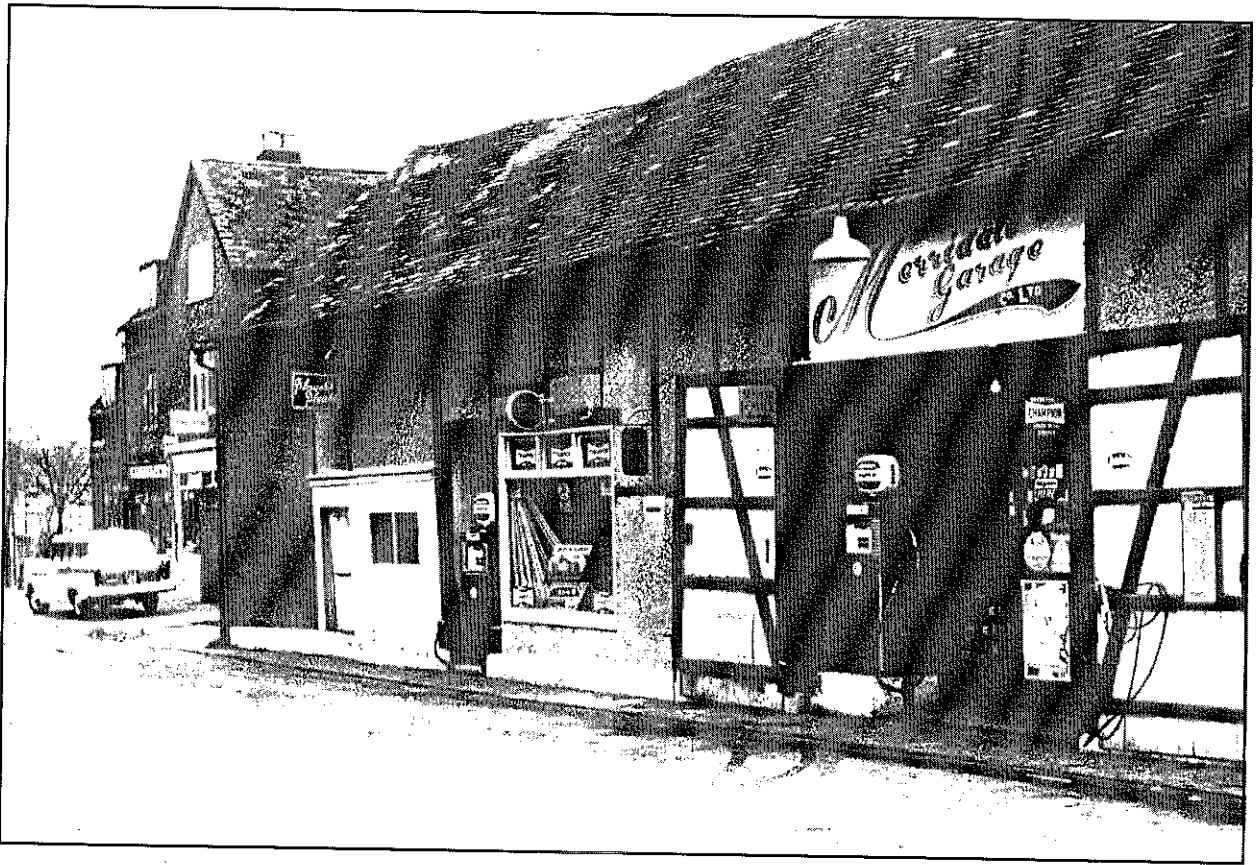


Plate 3



Plate 4